

**ST PAUL'S CHURCH ROOMS
TIVERTON
DEVON**

HISTORIC BUILDING APPRAISAL

April 2013

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Project SPC224

ST PAUL'S CHURCH ROOMS, TIVERTON, DEVON

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Generally

This appraisal has been compiled at the request of Randell Burton Architects, on behalf of St Paul's Church, Tiverton. It follows a Method Statement based on a brief prepared by the Devon Historic Environment Team (DHET reference ARCH/DM/MD/19981) for an historic building appraisal in support of an extant planning application to Mid Devon District Council (12/01653/LBC) for alterations to the fabric of the building.

The building is listed Grade II (see Appendix and Devon Historic Environment Record Monument ID MDV 24647) and is situated within a designated conservation area.

This appraisal is based on a site visit made by Martin and Susan Watts on 15 March 2013. It is intended to be read with drawings and photographs attached. The plans and elevations are survey drawings of the existing building prepared by Tor Surveys Limited for Randell Burton Architects, reproduced with their permission.

Location

The building is an L-shaped block located on the south side of St Paul's Square at its junction with Church Street and its southern extension, Brewin Road, in West Exe, Tiverton, at NGR SS 9513 1248. The site stands on level ground at about 61.5m above Ordnance Datum.

Historical background

West Exe or Westexe was an industrial suburb linked to the town of Tiverton by a bridge from at least the 14th century. It was important for its fulling mills in the later medieval and post-medieval periods, and a substantial cotton mill was built there in the 1790s. This was not a success, however, and the requirement for military uniforms during the Napoleonic Wars saw its conversion to woollen manufacture. The mill was for sale in 1815 and a year later was taken over by John Heathcoat, a lace manufacturer, who moved to Tiverton from Loughborough to avoid the machine-breaking activity of the Luddites (Keene 2004, 43). By the 1860s the factory was central to Tiverton's prosperity and is estimated to have employed some 20 per cent of the town's population (Brayshay 1991, 83). Heathcoat took over a number of existing properties in West Exe and from the 1840s built housing for his workers (*ibid* 85-6). A map published in 1790 in Martin Dunsford's *Historical Memoirs of Tiverton* shows some tenements in the area of the present St Paul's Square, apparently with small gardens which overlooked fields to the west and south, although the 1802 preparatory drawing made by the Ordnance Survey shows only dwelling houses on both sides of the principal West Exe road, which runs along the west bank of the river.

There was apparently no provision for religious observance in West Exe during the Middle Ages (Keene 1996, 18) and the site for a church on part of Helling's Fields was donated by John Heathcoat. St Paul's church was designed by Manners and Gill of Bath and built between 1854-6, the work being supervised by Gideon A. Boyce, a local architect (DBG 2007, 2; Cherry & Pevsner 2004, 818-9; Keene 1996, 19). St Paul's church and the houses in St Paul's Square and St Paul's Street were an independent project

undertaken by Heathcoat's partner and son-in-law, Ambrose Brewin, who died prematurely in 1855. His widow Caroline, John Heathcoat's daughter, then took on the role of patron. The rents from the houses were intended to generate income to endow the church (Brayshay 1991, 93). Brayshay observed that 'Because superficially these 'Brewin' terraces preserve the architectural harmony of the district, they have sometimes been confused with those erected by the factory for lace hands. But with their attractive rusticated door arches, triple-segmented fan lights and generally larger proportions, the twenty Brewin dwellings formed a small middle-class enclave in the midst of an essentially working-class district. Indeed their occupants included no lace factory hands at all in the censuses of 1871 and 1881.' (Brayshay 1991, 93). According to Cherry and Pevsner (2004, 818-9) the buildings around St Paul's church represent 'the most coherent piece of town planning in Tiverton, with low, generously scaled terraces still in the Georgian tradition, of c.1850. Each house of three bays, door-ways with intermittent rustication, broad eaves, and houses with rounded recessed corners.' Cherry and Pevsner give a date of c.1850 but other sources indicate that the church rooms, which form part of this town planning, were built in about 1860. Their architect is at present unknown.

The Ordnance Survey 1:500 town map (1855-95) marks the subject site as 'Mission Room & Sunday School' (Figure 2) and it is similarly labelled on the first edition 1:2500 (1880s-1890s) (Figure 3). On the second and third editions (1904-6 and 1930s) (Figure 4) it is simply described as 'Sunday School'. The building is still in use as church rooms, with meeting rooms and kitchens, a fine hall at first floor level and storage facilities.

General description of the building

The building, which is L-shaped on plan, contains two storeys, with an attic in the southern short leg of the L which fronts Brewin Road (see Figure 1).

Exterior:

The principal north elevation which faces St Paul's Church gives the appearance of being a terrace of four houses. That at the west end (No.1) is in use as a dwelling and is not part of this appraisal. The north and east elevations are of a yellowish brick laid in Flemish bond, with round-headed doorways with rusticated and moulded stone architraves. The north elevation has four doorways and the east has a single central doorway in the gable end and a second doorway serving the wing to the south. The doors, which are painted blue, are four panelled, and set in moulded frames. The door reveals have Greek key moulding and there are semi-circular three-paned fixed fanlights above the door heads. The windows openings have cast-iron cills and the windows are all timber-framed sashes with glazing bars, the top and bottom lights being four panes wide by two high on the ground and first floor (north) and ground floor (east). The upper floor of the east elevation has a central round-headed sash window, with a smaller window with two sashes each with four panes, on both sides. The cast-iron rainwater downpipes are recessed into the brickwork. The roofs are slated, with a generous overhang at the eaves, and there is a brick ridge chimney stack towards the west end of the main roof.

The west gable end and rear walls of both the northern and eastern ranges are of rubble stone with brick heads and dressings to door and window openings. There is brickwork from ground to eaves level between the ground floor windows of G5 and G6, presumably indicating the course of a former chimney flue. The rear windows are timber-framed sashes with glazing bars, similar to those on the principal elevations. The south gable and part of the west elevation of the east range are rendered. There is a small cobbled yard to

the rear of the building, enclosed by stone and brick walls, with small stone-built service buildings against the south wall which are now used for storage.

Interior:

The ground floor is entered from St Paul's Square through the third doorway from the east. This leads into a through passage, with a stair on the west side. The rooms and spaces within the building are shown and numbered on the plans and described in general terms below. The plan divides conveniently into the principal front range - the ground floor rooms G1 to G6 with the hall F1 above - and the rear range which, although accessible through from the front range at both ground and first floor levels, has its own entrance from Brewin Street. Both ranges have back doors, which open onto the small walled yard.

Front range:

Where visible, the ground floor is of suspended timber construction. Several of the rooms have vinyl or carpets covering the boards. The skirtings are deep, with elaborately moulded tops. The lower part of the walls up to the dado rail, which is at about 1.18m from the floor, are clad with vertical tongued and V-grooved boards. The skirtings and wall boarding are painted and the walls above dado level are plastered and painted. The sash windows are set in moulded and painted timber frames with sash boxes and wide timber cill boards. Ceilings are finished with plain plaster or Artex, and painted.

The internal doors are generally single leaves with four panels, with moulded architraves. The door at the south end of the entrance passageway, to the back yard, is vertically boarded with ledges and braces, with a three-light rectangular fanlight over. Most of the internal doors are hung on rising butts. Some retain remains of their original door furniture and locks.

Between rooms G1 and G2, and G3 and G4, are double sliding doors, both leaves having six panels, with a timber moulding covering the upper sliding rail. The partition wall between G5 and G6 is of painted tongued and V-grooved boarding to full height, with two horizontal rails and a vertically-boarded ledged and braced door in a plain frame on the south side. If there was a fireplace against the back wall in G6, which is suggested by the brickwork visible in the exterior south wall (see photographs), it has been completely removed.

Inside the doorway at the west end of the north elevation there is an entrance passage, with a timber stair to the first floor against the west wall. This has plain balusters and a turned newel at its foot, and intermediate newels with decoratively turned lower ends. The handrail is mahogany and there is also a sturdy shaped mahogany handrail fixed to the wall. Below these stairs are built-in cupboards; that at the lower end may be original, being formed in vertical boards, while that to the south is a more recent insertion, of plasterboard with a flush door.

Most of the first floor of the front range is occupied by the hall, a fine space, lit by six sash windows on the north side, the tall semi-circular headed window with its two smaller side windows at the east end, and three sash windows on the south side. This space has a polished floor of narrow softwood boards, moulded skirtings, vertical wall boarding up to dado level and painted plastered walls above. On the south side at the east end is a pair of three-panelled doors leading onto the landing of the back stairs, with two pairs of four-panelled doors on either side. These were formerly for wall cupboards; that to the west is

still a cupboard, but the wall at the back of that to the east has been opened up to form a serving hatch through to the kitchen.

The hall ceiling is arched, plastered (Artex) and painted. There are five evenly spaced horizontal tie rods spanning from north to south, each with a vertical central rod, presumably reflecting the roof structure above. In the centre of three of the ceiling bays are square decorative vents.

Rear range:

This appears to have been constructed as a service range and the detailing and joinery are of lesser quality as a result. Although accessible on both levels from the front range, it has its own front door and staircase at the east end, entered from Brewin Street. On the ground floor is a passage running east-west along the rear of the front range, with a timber stair against the south wall. The door at the west end, to the back yard, is vertically boarded and framed, with ledges and braces, and a narrow rectangular fixed fanlight over which has been reduced in height (see photograph, page 14). There is a step up into G7, which has a suspended timber floor. The walls are papered and painted and the ceiling is finished with Artex, with some recent plain plaster repairs. There is a chimney breast at the south end, but the fireplace has been removed and its opening blocked and papered over. There is a small service stair from ground to first floor behind a doorway on the west side, between G7 and G8. G8 is now a plain space, with an inserted WC in a cubicle and a tall sash window with two by two panes to the back yard. There was a doorway to the north of this window, which has been closed in brickwork externally.

The stair to the first floor is slightly inferior to that at the west end, although still nicely detailed with turned newels, plain balusters and a mahogany handrail. It is lit by a sash window at first floor level.

A modern kitchen has been inserted into the room at the east end of the landing at first floor level (F2), with a serving hatch formed through a former wall cupboard in the hall. There is a chimney breast at the south end of this room, again blanked off. In the south-west corner is a door leading onto a narrow timber stair up to the attic.

The room to the west of the kitchen (F3) now contains a modern WC and wash basin.

The attic is lit by a modern rooflight on the west roof slope. There is a hatch giving access to the roof space over this area, which has been re-roofed. The roof is of two bays, with a central truss, the principals of which are visible in the attic room. The original brick chimney stacks have been truncated and there is evidence of scorching or burning on the central truss principal within the roof space, which has been repaired with new timbers bolted to its north face. There is a single purlin running over the back of the principals on both slopes. All of the rafters which could be seen appear to have been renewed. The roof slopes are felted under the slates. Full access to this roof and the main roof, over the hall was not achieved.

Discussion

From the layout of the building and the consistency of its interior detailing, St Paul's Church Rooms appear to have survived much as designed and built, with a series of good-sized rooms on the ground floor and a large first floor hall for meetings. The only significant insertion at ground floor level appears to be the vertically-boarded partition between rooms G5 and G6, although the possible removal of a fireplace in G6 suggests that further alterations may have taken place at the rear of the front range. The consistency of joinery and the nature of the present decorations make it difficult to determine the extent of any such alterations. The joinery - skirtings, wall panelling, dado rail and architraves - in the front range of rooms and the first floor hall is of better quality, with more elaborate mouldings, than that of the smaller rooms at the rear. Likewise the stairway at the west end of the front range is more generous than that in the passageway entered from Brewin Road, and the rear range may therefore be considered as the service wing. The whole appears to be of a single building phase, however, which is generally stated to be about 1860. The first floor hall, with its arched ceiling, is an impressive and generous space. There have been some minor alterations and modifications, notably with the insertion of services in the form of kitchens and WCs on both ground and first floor levels, and the roof of the rear range has been rebuilt, possibly after fire damage. There are no surviving chimney stacks through the roof of this range.

Conclusion

Although not actually part of John Heathcoat's workers' housing, St Paul's Church Rooms were designed and built to form an integral part of the planned townscape of West Exe. The building is of good quality and, as noted by Brayshay (1991, 93), of slightly higher status in its appearance and detailing than the lace factory workers' housing elsewhere in the neighbourhood. It is a remarkably unspoilt example of mid-19th century middle class community architecture. It has been maintained in good condition and retains much original detailing and joinery, that in the service wing at the rear being of lesser quality.

The present proposals intend to create more flexibility for use of the spaces within the building. They allow for the retention of the external appearance of the important principal north and east elevations. The existing internal staircase at the west end is to be retained, but significant alterations are proposed to the rear service wing. This will result in some ground-works in the rear yard, which retains much of its original cobbled surface. Significant archaeological deposits are unlikely to be found, however, as the site stands on the floodplain of the river Exe and was in agricultural or horticultural use prior to the buildings being erected in *c.*1860.

It is understood from the Heritage Statement prepared by Randell Burton as part of the current planning application (Burton 2012) that the principal elevations are to be retained and maintained and the internal joinery - doors, architraves and skirtings - will also be retained, cleaned and re-decorated. It is therefore considered that no further recording of the building fabric will be necessary.

Martin Watts
April 2013

References

Brayshay, M. 1991: Heathcoat's Industrial Housing in Tiverton, Devon. *Southern History* 13, 82-104

Burton, L. 2012: *Heritage Statement, St Paul's Church Rooms, Tiverton*

Cherry, B & Pevsner, N. 2004: *Devon* (The Buildings of England)

Devon Buildings Group, 2007: *Notes for Twenty-second Annual General Meeting, Tiverton* (27 October 2007)

Keene, B. 1996: *Window on Westex*. Tiverton & Mid Devon Museum Trust

Keene, B. 2004: *The Watermills of Tiverton*

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Alban Morley, St Paul's church office, for arranging access and providing keys and to Sue Watts, for her assistance with the site appraisal and map work.

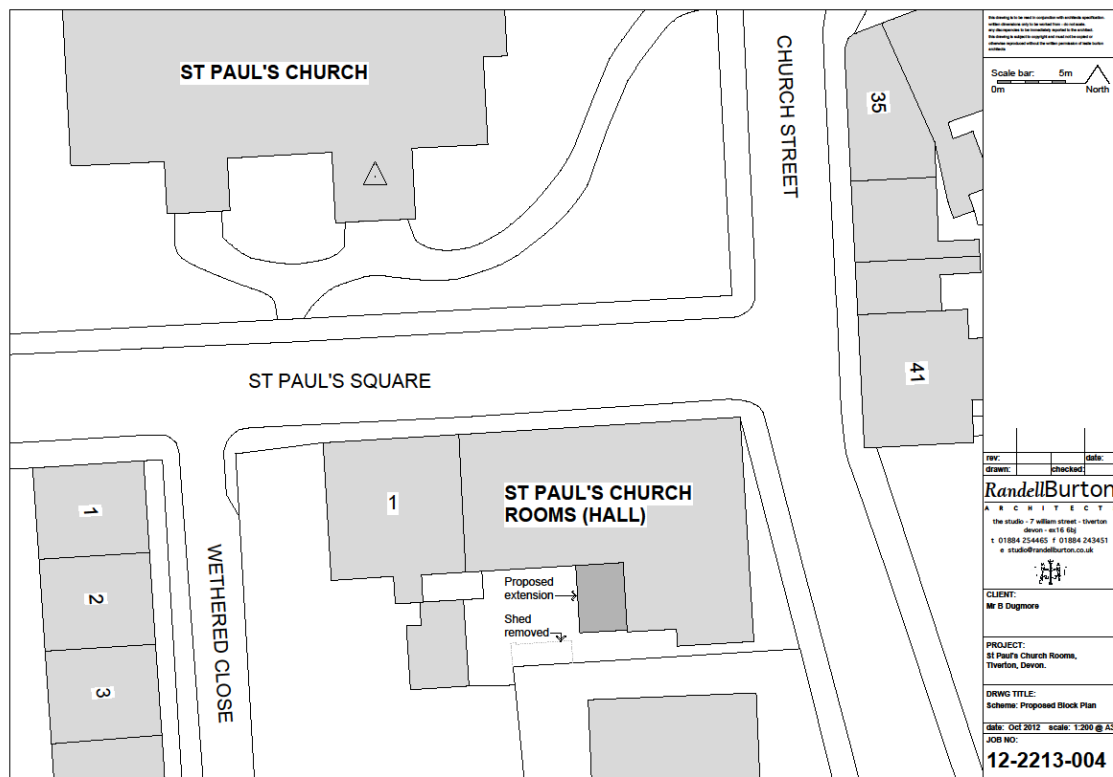


Figure 1. St Paul's Church Rooms, Tiverton: site block plan



Figure 2. Tiverton. From Ordnance Survey 1:500 town plan, 1855-95
 Note: maps not reproduced to scale

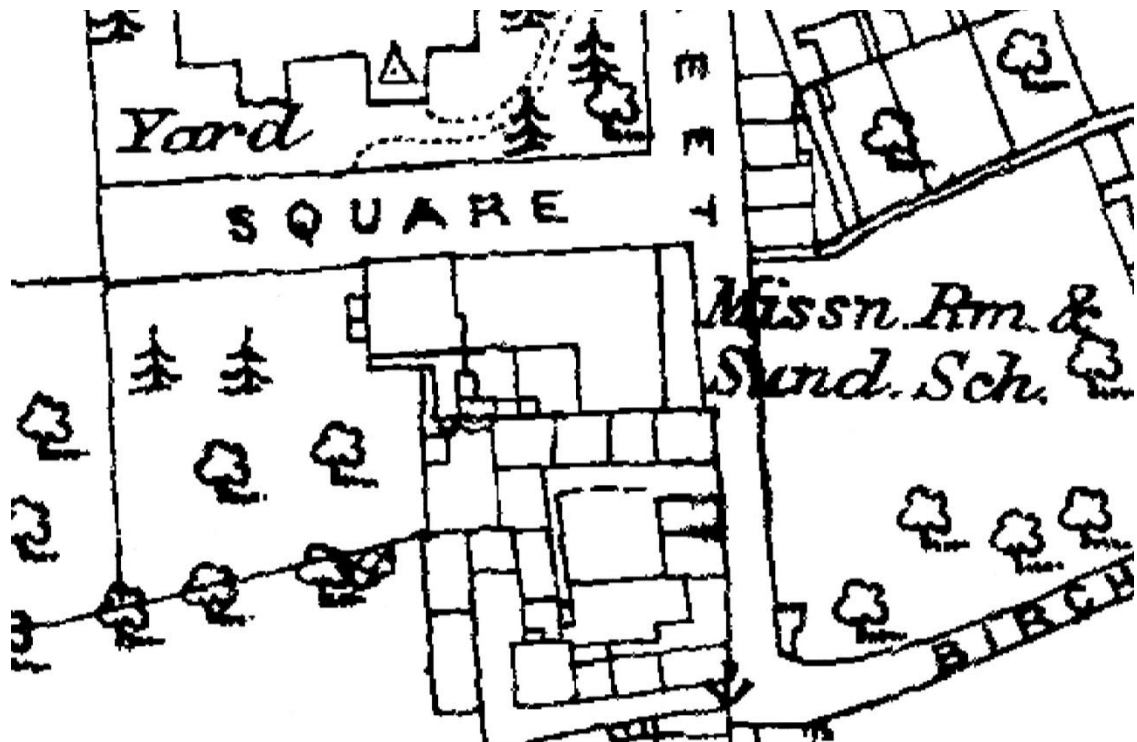


Figure 3. St Paul's Square, Tiverton. Ordnance Survey 1:2500, first edition, 1880-90

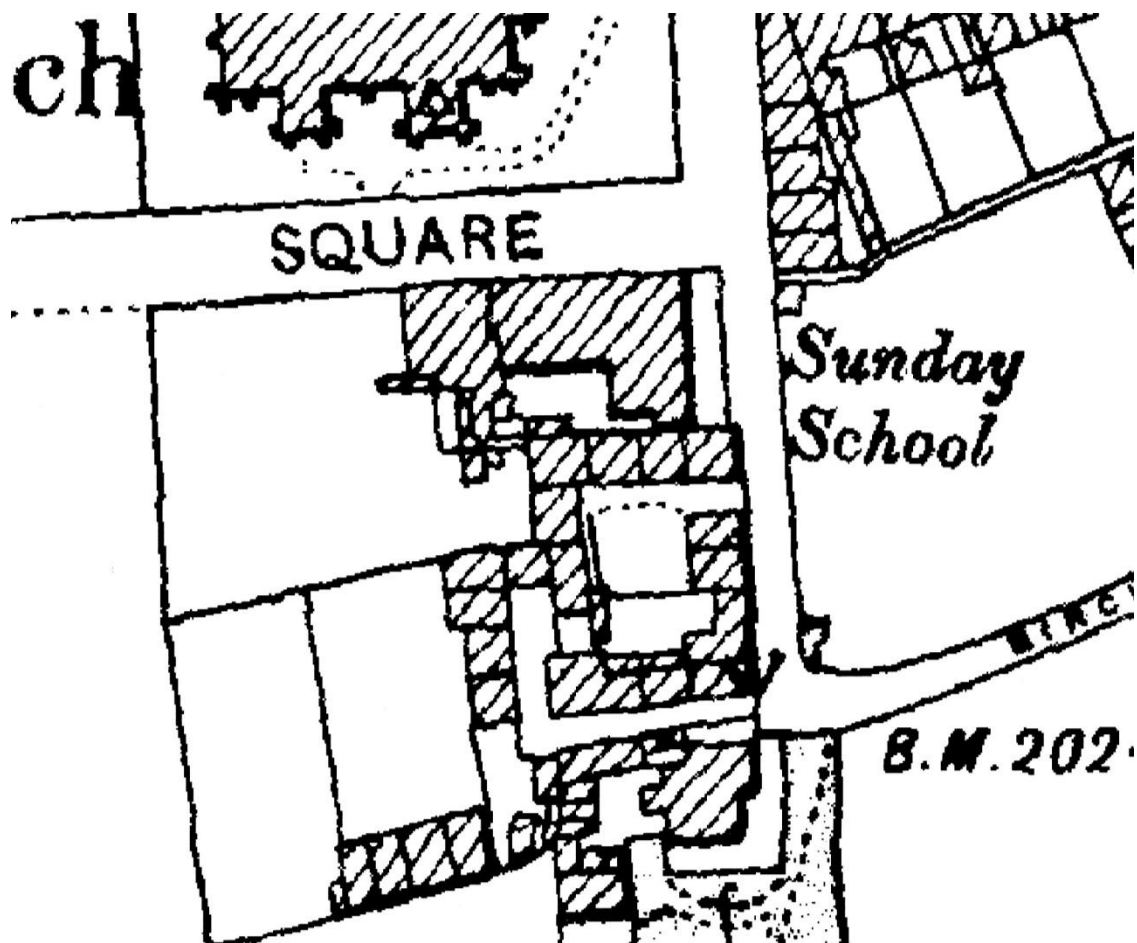
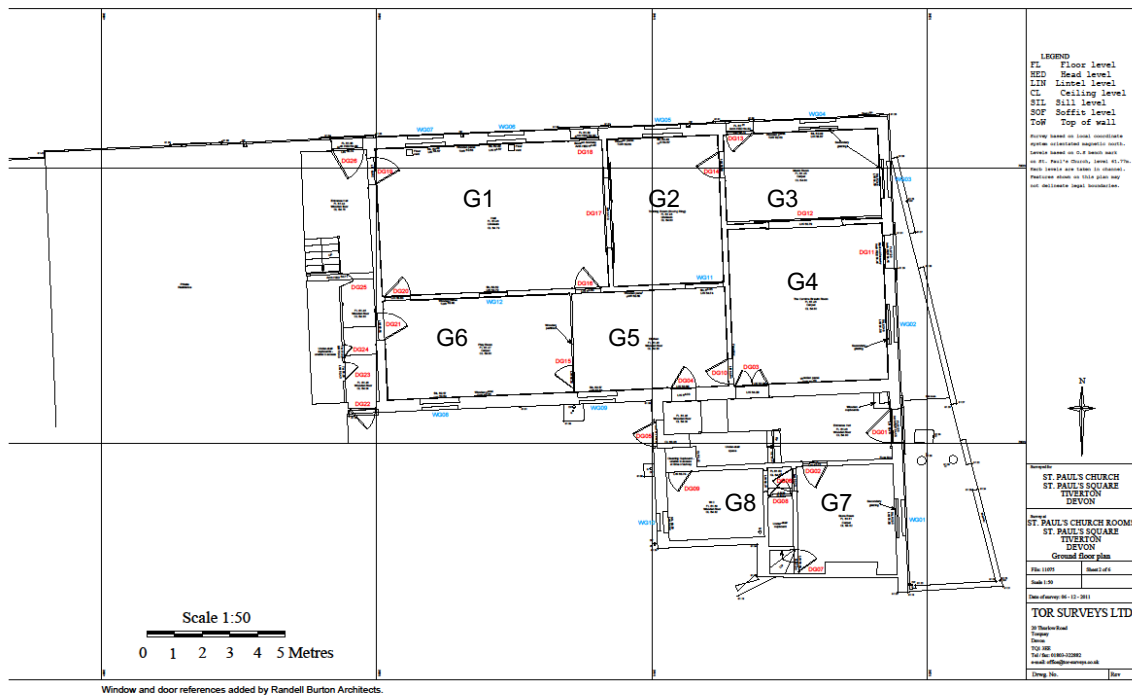


Figure 4. St Paul's Square, Tiverton. Ordnance Survey 1:2500, second edition, 1904-6



Ground floor plan

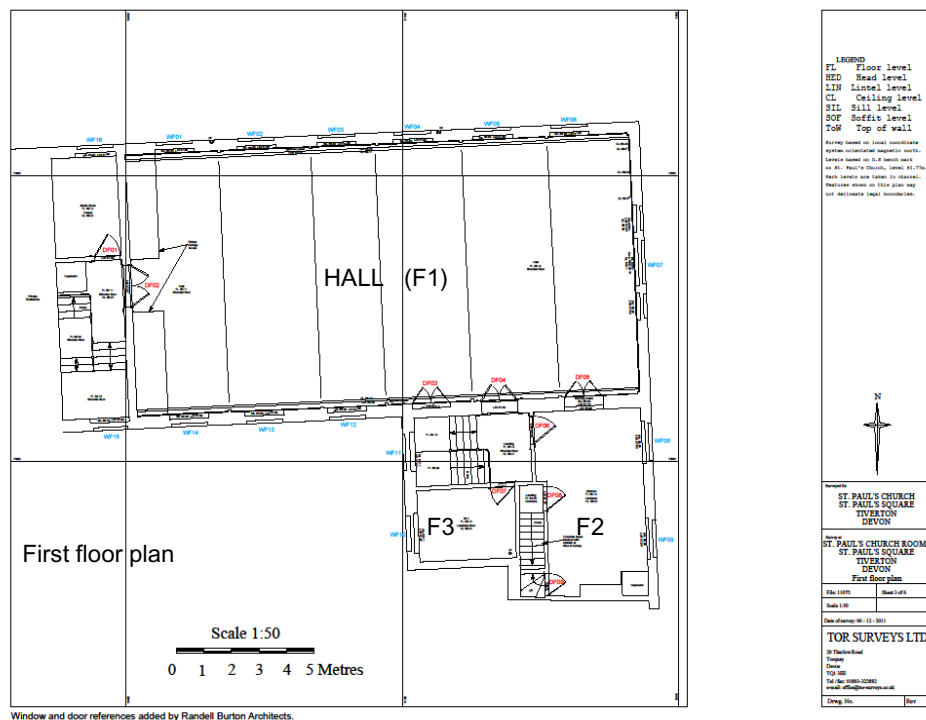


Figure 5. St Paul's Church Rooms. Ground and first floor plans



Figure 6a. North (principal) and south (rear) elevations



Figure 6b. East elevation, to Brewin Street, and west (rear) to yard



St Paul's Church Rooms, from the north-east



St Paul's Church Rooms, east elevation from the south-east



Detail of arched door head and moulding



Detail of elevation, showing typical sash windows and panelled door



St Paul's Church Rooms and No 1 St Paul's Square, west end and rear



Rear of St Paul's Church Rooms from Wethered Close



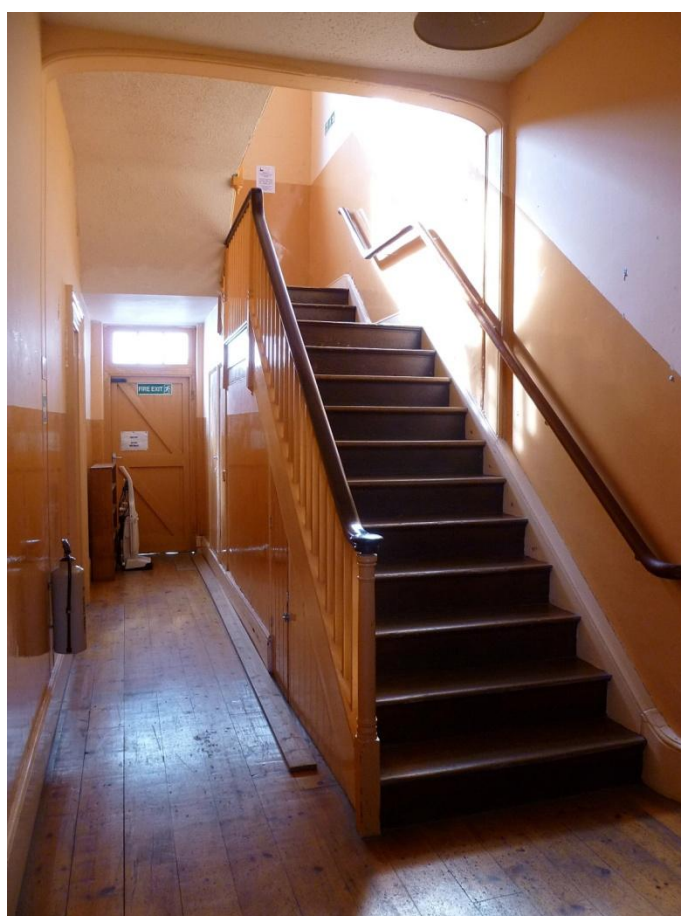
South elevation from the rear yard



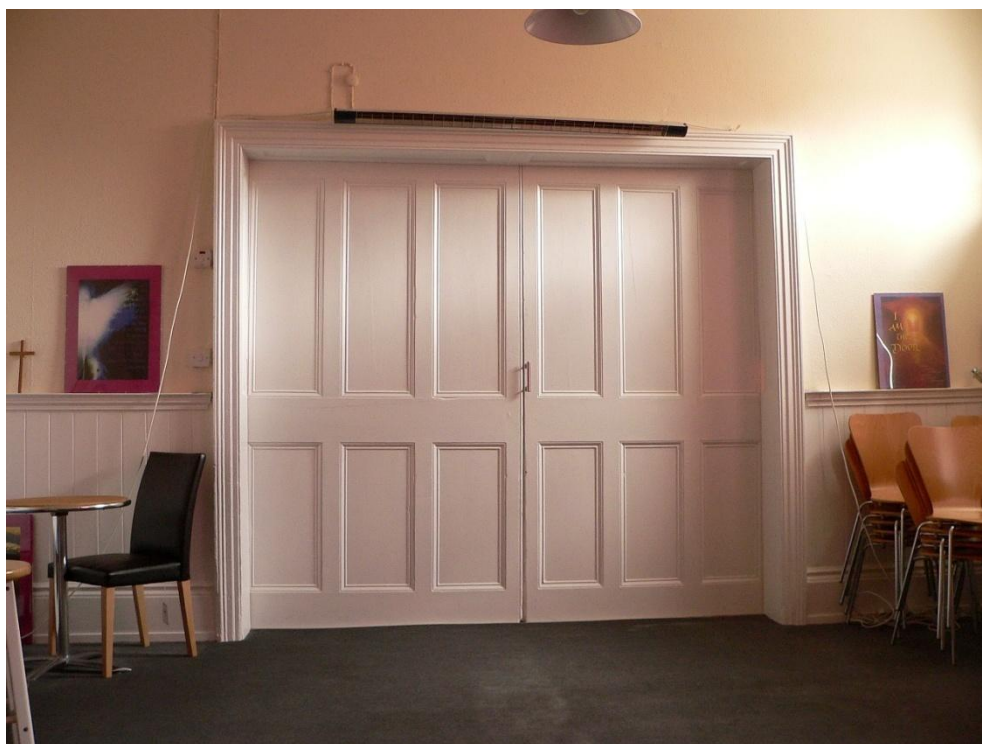
West elevation of rear block, overlooking yard



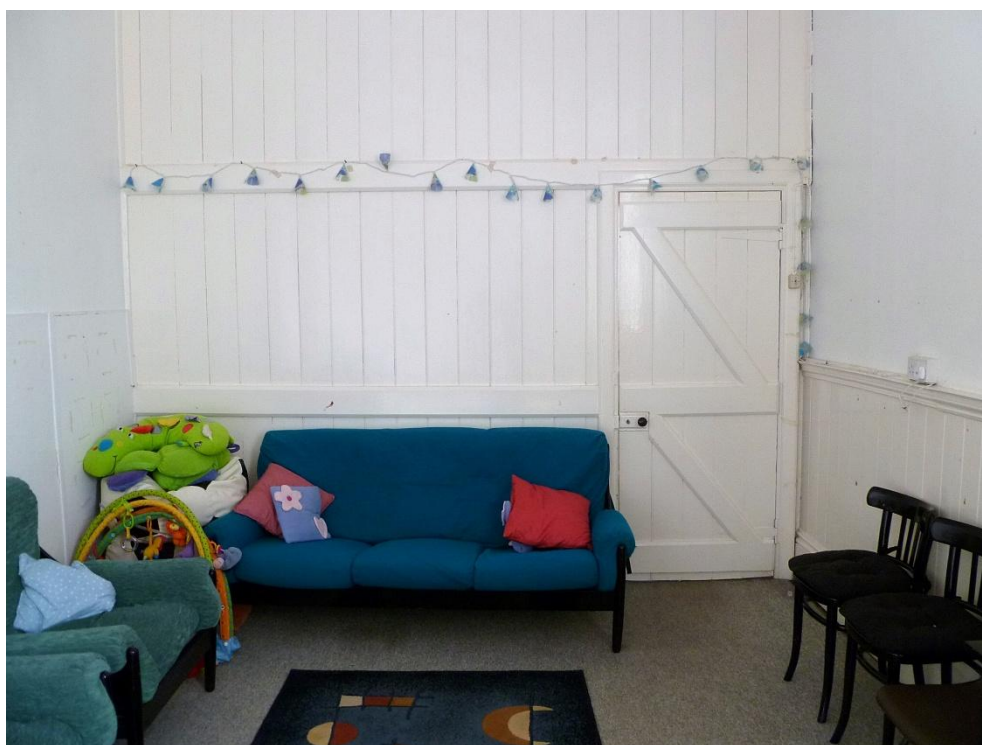
Main stairway, first floor landing



Main stairway and passageway, with door to yard at rear



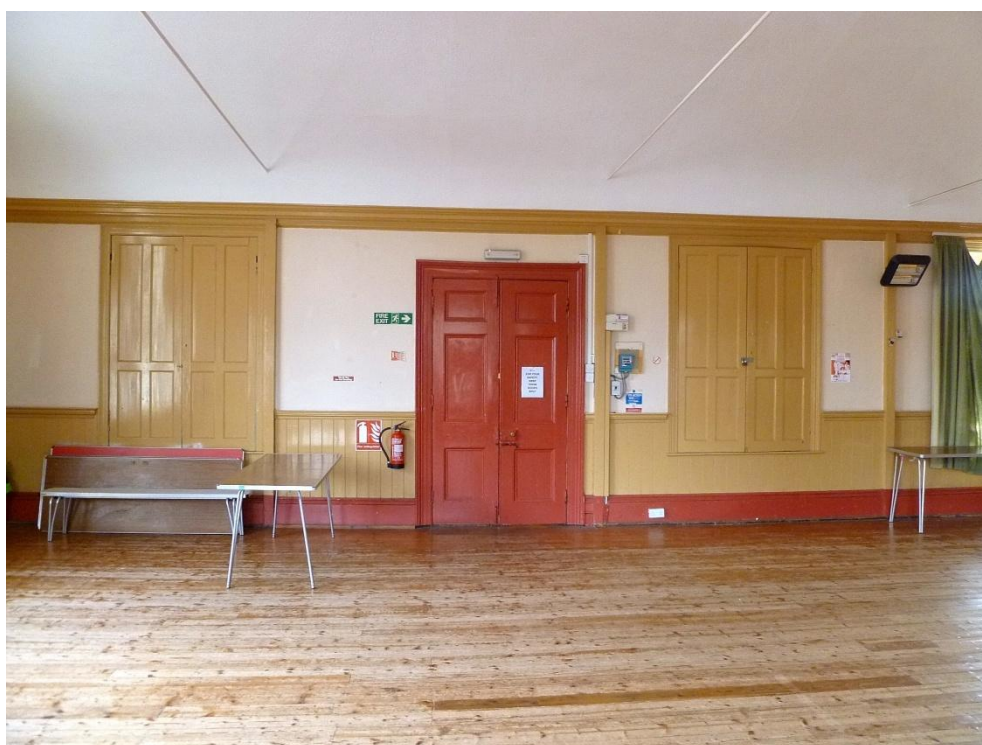
Panelled sliding doors between G4 and G3
Note quality of joinery: deep moulded skirtings and wall panelling



Boarded partition between G6 and G5



First floor hall, looking to east end



Doorway to rear stairs and wall cupboards at east end of hall



First floor kitchen with serving hatch to hall



Detail of skirting and architrave moulding in rear block



Rear (service) staircase, step up and door to G7 on left



Service stair, left, and rear door to back yard

APPENDIX: LISTED BUILDING DESCRIPTION

Location: 1 St Paul's Square, Tiverton, Devon EX16 5JD

Description: School Adjacent to Number 1

Grade: II

Date Listed: 14 December 1972

English Heritage Building ID: 485358

OS Grid Reference: SS9513312491

SS9512 ST PAUL'S SQUARE, Tiverton 848-1/6/271 (South side) 14/12/72 School, adjacent to No.1

(Formerly Listed as: ST PAUL'S SQUARE (South side) School and No.1)

GV II

School, c1860. On the north side, St Paul's Square, the school is either designed to give the appearance of a terrace of houses or has been expanded into a terrace of middle class houses. Architect unknown to date. According to Brayshay the school was built for Caroline Brewin, the daughter of John Heathcoat, as part of a group of consistently designed buildings, including St Paul's Street and centred on St Paul's Church, built on land donated by Heathcoat and funded from rentals from the houses.

MATERIALS: yellow Flemish bond brick to the show elevations; stone rubble rear and end walls with brick dressings, south end wall roughcast; slate roofs; stacks with brick shafts and crowned chimney pots; cast-iron rainwater goods; cast-iron window sills, similar to those found on Heathcoat's industrial housing.

STYLE: Georgian.

PLAN: the school is on a corner site between the south side of St Paul's Square and Brewing Road. The arrangement of windows suggests that there is a hall on the first floor at the east end.

EXTERIOR: 2 storeys. 5-window front to Brewin Road, gabled to the front at the right end, with deep verges on brackets. The ground floor has three 16-pane hornless timber sashes and two round-headed doorways which are domesticated in manner with rusticated quoins Greek key mouldings on the reveals and simple fanlights with spoke glazing bars. 4-panel front doors have the lower panels flush. Triple first-floor window in gable has a round-headed central sash with margin panes flanked by two 4 over 4-pane sashes. The St Paul's Square elevation is 10 bays arranged as the facades of 4 houses with the downpipes of the rainwater goods sunk in chases in the walls. 10 first-floor 16-pane timber hornless sashes. 4 doorways, matching those on the east end, all with disused panelled doors. The rear elevation retains sash windows.

INTERIOR: partially inspected. Original joinery survives.

(Southern History: Brayshay M: 'Heathcoat's Industrial Housing in Tiverton, Devon': 1991, 82-104).

Listing NGR: SS9513312491

Source: English Heritage